

# INTRODUCTION

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HAVE YOU EVER FELT THIS WAY, OR HEARD COMMENTS SUCH AS these expressed by friends or coworkers?

“I’m tired of being excluded and having my ideas dismissed.”

“Being the best person for the job means nothing here.”

“I have to be so careful in what I say and do.”

“I can’t and won’t act like someone I’m not.”

Or, maybe these scenarios describe you or someone you know.

Susan graduated at the top of her MBA class and landed a well-paying, entry-level position at a major firm. She loves to collaborate. She excels at creating alliances and developing those relationships. You can see that in her expanding client base. They love doing business with her.

Susan is trying, though failing, to fit in with the men at the office. She had no clue that the culture would be so competitive. It wasn’t that way at the university. She feels she doesn’t stand a chance to be promoted, regardless of her contribution. Tired of being undervalued and excluded, Susan is looking for a company that appreciates her and offers her room to grow.

Bill loves to compete. To him, work is like a daily sporting event and lunch is halftime. He’s a good strategic planner and a get-it-done person. He’s at his best when he can work and solve problems alone. His performance reviews reflect his achievements. His company truly values Bill’s efforts.

But Bill has difficulty working on teams and waiting for decisions. He's no longer sanctioned to work independently and act in ways others now consider "too quick and reckless." At the last staff meeting, he thinks he said something wrong to one of the women executives, but he's not sure what it was he said. He feels he was misunderstood. Bill is faltering—he can feel it but doesn't know how to correct it.

We often hear comments and stories such as these in our workshops and seminars. We know Susan and Bill. They are real people, and they are not alone. There are millions of others just like them who are stuck, or failing, or quitting—not because of their abilities, but because they haven't figured out how to work effectively with the opposite gender.

We all want to work more successfully with each other, but we're unsure how. We don't understand why the women or men we work with communicate, solve problems, make decisions, and deal with stress the way they do. Women and men may see the same things, but they do so through a completely different set of lenses, very often thinking and talking past each other.

The conventional wisdom that women and men are no different from each other, have the same aspirations, and are expected to achieve their goals in the same fashion is precisely why we're experiencing a cultural breakdown today instead of the equality breakthrough we expected by now.

In blind pursuit of gender sameness, we've painted ourselves into a corner. In trying to fix women to act less as themselves and more like men, and in chastising men for behaving as men, we've set in motion a perpetual cycle of miscommunication and misunderstanding. We're not being authentic with each other and even less so with ourselves.

## COMING TOGETHER

Epiphanies tend to put us on paths that lead to even greater discoveries and, at times, amazing synergies.

As authors working in similar fields, we were very familiar with each other's work. John Gray's message in his groundbreaking book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, had global impact. Through stories and examples that people could connect with, he revealed why and how women and men communicate, think, feel, and react differently, which improved thousands of relationships and saved marriages. Similarly, Barbara Annis, in her work on gender intelligence and inclusive leadership, pioneered a transformational shift in cultural attitudes on the importance of gender unity to personal success. Her book, *Same Words, Different Language*, helped career-oriented men and women remove barriers to their professional growth and personal happiness and discover a new level of conversation and collaboration.

Together, we discovered that we were talking to the same individuals but in two different arenas—helping men and women as coworkers, bound by a desire to succeed and find greater understanding and success in their working lives; and helping them as couples, bound by a desire to love, find greater understanding and trust in their personal lives.

What brought us together and why we are speaking together in this book is because these two worlds—our two lives—are not as separate as they were when we first began our respective journeys.

Paralleling men's and women's desire to understand and be understood in the workplace and at home is a growing need to find congruity in their work life and personal life. We're looking for ways to orchestrate our jobs, relationships, and responsibilities so that everyone feels appreciated and fulfilled. But we're often blind to each other's needs and expectations, and often unable to express and satisfy our own needs.

## RECOGNIZING OUR BLIND SPOTS

When driving a car, our sides and rearview mirrors don't often reveal everything we need to see. We find we have blind spots and turn our